

## PART ONE: TO START A WAR



### **INTRODUCTION**

November 11, 1918.

All across the Western front, the clocks that were lucky enough to escape the four years of shelling chimed the eleventh hour. And with that the First World War came to an end.

From 10 o'clock to 11 — the hour for the cessation of hostilities — the opposed batteries simply raised hell. Not even the artillery prelude to our advance into the Argonne had anything on it. To attempt an advance was out of the question. It was not a barrage. It was a deluge.

[. . .]

Nothing quite so electrical in effect as the sudden stop that came at 11 A. M. has ever occurred to me. It was 10:60 precisely and — the roar stopped like a motor car hitting a wall. The resulting quiet was uncanny in comparison. From somewhere far below ground, Germans began to appear. They clambered to the parapets and began to shout wildly. They threw their rifles, hats, bandoleers, bayonets and trench knives toward us. They began to sing.

—[Lieutenant Walter A. Davenport, 101st Infantry Regiment, US Army](#)

And just like that, it was over. Four years of the bloodiest carnage the world had ever seen came to a stop as sudden and bewildering as its start. And the world vowed “Never again.”

Each year, we lay the wreath. We hear “The Last Post.” We mouth the words “never again” like an incantation. But what does it *mean*? To answer this question, we have to understand what WWI *was*.

WWI was an explosion, a breaking point in history. In the smoldering shell hole of that great cataclysm lay the industrial-era optimism of never-ending progress. Old verities about the glory of war lay strewn around the battlefields of that “Great War” like a fallen soldier left to die in No Man’s Land, and along with it lay all the broken dreams of a world order that had been blown apart. Whether we know it or not, we here in the 21st century are still living in the crater of that explosion, the victims of a First World War that we are only now beginning to understand.

What was World War One about? How did it start? Who won? And what did they win? Now, 100 years after those final shots rang out, these questions still puzzle historians and laymen alike. But as we shall see, this confusion is not a happenstance of history but the wool that has been pulled over our eyes to stop us from seeing what WWI really was.

This is the story of WWI that you didn’t read in the history books. This is **The WWI Conspiracy**.

## ***PART ONE – TO START A WAR***

June 28, 1914.

The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife Sophie are in Sarajevo for a military inspection. In retrospect, it’s a risky provocation, like tossing a match into a powder keg. Serbian nationalism is rising, the Balkans are in a tumult of diplomatic crises and regional wars, and tensions between the kingdom of Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire are set to spill over.

But despite warnings and ill omens, the royal couple’s security is extremely lax. They board an open-top sports car and proceed in a six-car motorcade along a pre-announced route. After an inspection of the military barracks, they head toward the Town Hall for a scheduled reception by the Mayor. The visit is going ahead exactly as planned and precisely on schedule.

And then the bomb goes off.

As we now know, the motorcade was a death trap. Six assassins lined the royal couple’s route that morning, armed with bombs and pistols. The first two failed to act, but the third, Nedeljko Čabrinović, panicked and threw his bomb onto the folded back cover of the Archduke’s convertible. It bounced off onto the street, exploding under the next car in the convoy. Franz Ferdinand and his wife, unscathed, were rushed on to the Town Hall, passing the other assassins along the route too quickly for them to act.

Having narrowly escaped death, the Archduke called off the rest of his scheduled itinerary to visit the wounded from the bombing at the hospital. By a remarkable twist of fate, the driver took the couple down the wrong route, and, when ordered to reverse, stopped the car directly in front of the delicatessen where would-be assassin Gavrilo Princip had gone after having failing in his mission

along the motorcade. There, one and a half metres in front of Princip, were the Archduke and his wife. He took two shots, killing both of them.

Yes, even the official history books—the books written and published by the “winners”—record that the First World War started as the result of a conspiracy. After all, it was—as all freshman history students are taught—the conspiracy to assassinate the Archduke Franz Ferdinand that led to the outbreak of war.

*That* story, the official story of the origins of World War I, is familiar enough by now: In 1914, Europe was an interlocking clockwork of alliances and military mobilization plans that, once set in motion, ticked inevitably toward all out warfare. The assassination of the Archduke was merely the excuse to set that clockwork in motion, and the resulting “July crisis” of diplomatic and military escalations led with perfect predictability to continental and, eventually, global war. In this carefully sanitized version of history, World War I starts in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914.

But this official history leaves out so much of the real story about the build up to war that it amounts to a lie. But it does get one thing right: The First World War *was* the result of a conspiracy.

To understand this conspiracy we must turn not to Sarajevo and the conclave of Serbian nationalists plotting their assassination in the summer of 1914, but to a chilly drawing room in London in the winter of 1891. There, three of the most important men of the age—men whose names are but dimly remembered today—are taking the first concrete steps toward forming a secret society that they have been discussing amongst themselves for years. The group that springs from [this meeting](#) will go on to leverage the wealth and power of its members to shape the course of history and, 23 years later, will drive the world into the first truly global war.

Their plan reads like outlandish historical fiction. They will form a secret organization dedicated to the “extension of British rule throughout the world” and “the ultimate recovery of the United States of America as an integral part of a British Empire.” The group is to be structured along the lines of a religious brotherhood (the Jesuit order is repeatedly invoked as a model) divided into two circles: an inner circle, called “The Society of the Elect,” who are to direct the activity of the larger, outer circle, dubbed “The Association of Helpers” who are not to know of the inner circle’s existence.

“British rule” and “inner circles” and “secret societies.” If presented with this plan today, many would say it was the work of an imaginative comic book writer. But the three men who gathered in London that winter afternoon in 1891 were no mere comic book writers; they were among the wealthiest and most influential men in British society, and they had access to the resources and the contacts to make that dream into a reality.

Present at the meeting that day: William T. Stead, famed newspaper editor whose *Pall Mall Gazette* broke ground as a pioneer of tabloid journalism and whose *Review of Reviews* was enormously influential throughout the English-speaking world; Reginald Brett, later known as Lord Esher, an historian and politician who became friend, confidant and advisor to Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, and King George V, and who was known as one of the primary powers-behind-the-throne of his era; and Cecil Rhodes, the enormously wealthy diamond magnate whose exploits in South Africa and ambition to transform the African continent would earn him the nickname of “[Colossus](#)” by the satirists of the day.

But Rhodes' ambition was no laughing matter. If anyone in the world had the power and ability to form such a group at the time, it was Cecil Rhodes.

Richard Grove, historical researcher and author, [TragedyAndHope.com](http://TragedyAndHope.com).

**RICHARD GROVE:** Cecil Rhodes also was from Britain. He was educated at Oxford, but he only went to Oxford after he went to South Africa. He had an older brother he follows into South Africa. The older brother was working in the diamond mines, and by the time Rhodes gets there he's got a set up, and his brother says "I'm gonna go off and dig in the gold mines. They just found gold!" And so he leaves Cecil Rhodes, his younger brother—who's, like, in his 20s—with this whole diamond mining operation. Rhodes then goes to Oxford, comes back down to South Africa with the help of Lord Rothschild, who had funding efforts behind De Beers and taking advantage of that situation. And from there they start to use what—there's no other term than "slave labor," which then turns in later to the apartheid policy of South Africa.

**GERRY DOCHERTY:** Well, Rhodes was particularly important because in many ways, at the end of the 19th century, he seriously epitomized where capitalism was [and] where wealth really lay.

Gerry Docherty, WWI scholar and co-author of [\*Hidden History: The Secret Origins of the First World War\*](#).

**DOCHERTY:** Rhodes had the money and he had the contacts. He was a great Rothschild man and his mining wealth was literally uncountable. He wanted to associate himself with Oxford because Oxford gave him the kudos of the university of knowledge, of that kind of power.

And in fact that was centered in a very secretive place called "All Souls College." Still you'll find many references to All Souls College and "people behind the curtain" and such phrases [as] "power behind thrones." Rhodes was centrally important in actually putting money up in order to begin to gather together like-minded people of great influence.

Rhodes was not shy about his ambitions, and his intentions to form such a group were known to many. Throughout his short life, Rhodes discussed his intentions openly with many of his associates, who, unsurprisingly, happened to be among the most influential figures in British society at that time.

More remarkably, this secret society—which was to wield its power behind the throne—was not a secret at all. *The New York Times* even published an article discussing the founding of the group in the April 9, 1902, edition of the paper, shortly after Rhodes' death.

The article, headlined "[Mr. Rhodes's Ideal of Anglo-Saxon Greatness](#)" and carrying the remarkable sub-head "He Believed a Wealthy Secret Society Should Work to Secure the World's Peace and a British-American Federation," summarized this sensational plan by noting that Rhodes' "idea for the development of the English-speaking race was the foundation of 'a society copied, as to organization, from the Jesuits.'" Noting that his vision involved uniting "the United States Assembly and our House of Commons to achieve 'the peace of the world,'" the article quotes

Rhodes as saying: “The only thing feasible to carry out this idea is a secret society gradually absorbing the wealth of the world.”

This idea is laid down in black and white in a series of wills that Rhodes wrote throughout his life, wills that not only laid out his plan to create such a society and provided the funds to do so, but, even more remarkably, were [collected in a volume](#) published after his death by co-conspirator William T. Stead.

**GROVE:** Rhodes also left his great deal of money—not having any children, not having married, dying at a young age—left it in a very well-known last will and testament, of which there were several different editions naming different benefactors, naming different executors.

So in 1902 Cecil Rhodes dies. There’s a book published that contains his last will and testament. The guy who wrote the book, William T. Stead, was in charge of a British publication called *The Review of Reviews*. He was part of Rhodes’ Round Table group. He at one time was an executor for the will, and in that will it says that he laments the loss of America from the British Empire and that they should formulate a secret society with the specific aim of bringing America back into the Empire. Then he names all the countries that they need to include in this list to have world domination, to have an English-speaking union, to have British race as the enforced culture on all countries around the world.

The will contains the goal. The goal is amended over a series of years and supported and used to gain support. And then, by the time he dies in 1902, there’s funding, there’s a plan, there’s an agenda, there’s working groups, and it all launches and then takes hold. And then not too long later, you’ve got World War One and then from that you’ve got World War Two and then you’ve got a century of control and slavery that really could have been prevented.

When, at the time of Rhodes’ death in 1902, this “secret” society decided to partially reveal itself, it did so under the cloak of peace. It was only because they desired world peace, they insisted, that they had created their group in the first place, and only for the noblest of reasons that they aimed to “gradually absorb the wealth of the world.”

But contrary to this pacific public image, from its very beginnings the group was interested primarily in war. In fact, one of the very first steps taken by this “Rhodes Round Table” (as it was known by some) was to maneuver the British Empire into war in South Africa. This “Boer War” of 1899–1902 would serve a dual purpose: it would unite the disparate republics and colonies of South Africa into a single unit under British imperial control, and, not incidentally, it would bring the rich gold deposits of the Transvaal Republic into the orbit of the Rothschild/Rhodes-controlled British South Africa Company.

The war was, by the group’s own admission, entirely its doing. The point man for the operation was Sir Alfred Milner, a close associate of Rhodes and a member of the secret society’s inner circle who was then the governor of the British Cape Colony. Although largely forgotten today, Alfred Milner (later 1st Viscount Milner) was perhaps the most important single figure in Britain at the dawn of the 20th century. From Rhodes’ death in 1902, he became the unofficial head of the roundtable



group and directed its operations, leveraging the vast wealth and influence of the group's exclusive membership to his own ends.

With Milner, there was no compunction or moral hand-wringing about the methods used to bring about those ends. In a letter to Lord Roberts, Milner [casually confessed](#) to having engineered the Boer War: "I precipitated the crisis, which was inevitable, before it was too late. It is not very agreeable, and in many eyes, not a very creditable piece of business to have been largely instrumental in bringing about a war."

When Rhodes' co-conspirator and fellow secret society inner circle member William Stead objected to war in South Africa, Rhodes [told him](#): "You will support Milner in any measure that he may take short of war. I make no such limitation. I support Milner absolutely without reserve. If he says peace, I say peace; if he says war, I say war. Whatever happens, I say ditto to Milner."

The Boer War, involving unimaginable brutality—including the death of 26,000 women and children in the world's first (British) concentration camps—ended as Rhodes and his associates intended: with the formerly separate pieces of South Africa being united under British control. Perhaps even more importantly from the perspective of the secret society, it left Alfred Milner as High Commissioner of the new South African Civil Service, a position from which he would cultivate a team of bright, young, largely Oxford-educated men who would go on to serve the group and its ends.

And from the end of the Boer War onward, those ends increasingly centered around the task of eliminating what Milner and the Round Table perceived as the single greatest threat to the British Empire: Germany.

**DOCHERTY:** So in the start it was influence—people who could influence politics, people who had the money to influence statesmen—and the dream. The dream of actually crushing Germany. This was a basic mindset of this group as it gathered together.

Germany. In 1871, the formerly separate states of modern-day Germany united into a single empire under the rule of Wilhelm I. The consolidation and industrialization of a united Germany had fundamentally changed the balance of power in Europe. By the dawn of the 20th century, the British Empire found itself dealing not with its traditional French enemies or its long-standing Russian rivals for supremacy over Europe, but the upstart German Empire. Economically, technologically, even militarily; if the trends continued, it would not be long before Germany began to rival and even surpass the British Empire.

For Alfred Milner and the group he had formed around him out of the old Rhodes Round Table society, it was obvious what had to be done: to change France and Russia from enemies into friends as a way of isolating, and, eventually, crushing Germany.

Peter Hof, author of [\*The Two Edwards: How King Edward VII and Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey Fomented the First World War\*](#).

**PETER HOF:** Yes, well from the British perspective, Germany, after their unification in 1871, they became very strong very quickly. And over time this worried the British more and more, and they began to think that Germany represented a challenge to their

world hegemony. And slowly but surely they came to the decision that Germany must be confronted just as they had come to the same decision with regard to other countries—Spain and Portugal and especially France and now Germany.

German finished goods were marginally better than those of Britain, they were building ships that were marginally better than those of Britain, and all of this. The British elite very slowly came to the decision that Germany needed to be confronted while it was still possible to do so. It might not be possible to do so if they waited too long. And so this is how the decision crystallized.

I think that Britain might possibly have accepted the German ascendancy, but they had something that was close at hand, and that was the Franco-Russian Alliance. And they thought if they could hook in with that alliance, then they had the possibility of defeating Germany quickly and without too much trouble. And that is basically what they did.

But crafting an alliance with two of Britain's biggest rivals and turning public opinion against one of its dearest continental friends was no mean feat. To do so would require nothing less than for Milner and his group to seize control of the press, the military and all the diplomatic machinery of the British Empire. And so that's exactly what they did.

The first major coup occurred in 1899, while Milner was still in South Africa launching the Boer War. That year, the Milner Group ousted Donald Mackenzie Wallace, the director of the foreign department at *The Times*, and installed their man, Ignatius Valentine Chirol. Chirol, a former employee of the Foreign Office with inside access to officials there, not only helped to ensure that one of the most influential press organs of the Empire would spin all international events for the benefit of the secret society, but he helped to prepare his close personal friend, Charles Hardinge, to take on the crucial post of Ambassador to Russia in 1904, and, in 1906, the even more important post of Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office.

With Hardinge, Milner's Group had a foot in the door at the British Foreign Office. But they needed more than just their foot in that door if they were to bring about their war with Germany. In order to finish the coup, they needed to install one of their own as Foreign Secretary. And, with the appointment of Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary in December of 1905, that's precisely what happened.

Sir Edward Grey was a valuable and trusted ally of the Milner Group. He shared their anti-German sentiment and, in his important position of Foreign Secretary, showed no compunction at all about using secret agreements and unacknowledged alliances to further set the stage for war with Germany.

**HOF:** He became foreign secretary in 1905, I believe, and the foreign secretary in France was of course Delcassé. And Delcassé was very much anti-German and he was very passionate about the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine, and so he and the king hit it off very well together. And Edward Grey shared this anti-German feeling with the king—as I explained in my book how he came to have that attitude about Germany. But in any case, he had the same attitude with the king. They worked very well together. And Edward Grey very freely acknowledged the heavy role that the king played in British

foreign policy and he said that this was not a problem because he and the king were in agreement on most issues and so they worked with very well together.

The pieces were already beginning to fall into place for Milner and his associates. With Edward Grey as foreign secretary, Hardinge as his unusually influential undersecretary, Rhodes' co-conspirator Lord Esher installed as deputy governor of Windsor Castle where he had the ear of the king, and the king himself—whose unusual, hands-on approach to foreign diplomacy and whose wife's own hatred of the Germans dovetailed perfectly with the group's aims—the diplomatic stage was set for the formation of the Triple Entente between France, Russia and Great Britain. With France to the west and Russia to the east, England's secret diplomacy had forged the two pincers of a German-crushing vise.

All that was needed was an event that the group could spin to its advantage to prepare the population for war against their former German allies. Time and again throughout the decade leading up to the "Great War," the group's influential agents in the British press tried to turn every international incident into another example of German hostility.

When the Russo-Japanese War broke out, rumours swirled in London that it was in fact the Germans that had stirred up the hostilities. The theory went that Germany—in a bid to ignite conflict between Russia and England, who had recently concluded an alliance with the Japanese—had fanned the flames of war between Russia and Japan. The truth, of course, was almost precisely the opposite. Lord Lansdowne had conducted secret negotiations with Japan before signing a formal treaty in January 1902. Having exhausted their reserves building up their military, Japan turned to Cecil Rhodes' co-conspirator Lord Nathan Rothschild to [finance the war itself](#). Denying the Russian navy access to the Suez Canal and high-quality coal, which they *did* provide to the Japanese, the British did everything they could to ensure that the Japanese would crush the Russian fleet, effectively removing their main European competitor for the Far East. The Japanese navy was even [constructed in Britain](#), but these facts did not find their way into the Milner-controlled press.

When the Russians "accidentally" fired on British fishing trawlers in the North Sea in 1904, killing three fishermen and wounding several more, the British public was outraged. Rather than whip up the outrage, however, *The Times* and other mouthpieces of the secret society instead tried to paper over the incident. Meanwhile, the British Foreign Office outrageously tried to blame the incident on the Germans, kicking off a bitter press war between Britain and Germany.

The most dangerous provocations of the period centered around Morocco, when France—emboldened by secret military assurances from the British and backed up by the British press—engaged in a series of provocations, repeatedly breaking assurances to Germany that Morocco would remain free and open to German trade. At each step, Milner's acolytes, both in government and in the British press, cheered on the French and demonized any and every response from the Germans, real or imagined.

**DOCHERTY:** Given that we're living in a world of territorial aggrandizement, there was a concocted incident over Morocco and the allegation that Germany was secretly trying to take over the British/French influence on Morocco. And that literally was nonsense, but it was blown up into an incident and people were told "Prepare! You had better prepare yourself for the possibility of war because we will not be dictated to by that Kaiser person over in Berlin!"



One of the incidents—which I would need to make reference to to get the date perfectly right—referred to a threat. Well, it was portrayed as a threat. It was no more of a threat than a fly would be if it came into your room at the present moment—of a gunboat sitting off the coast of Africa. And it was purported that this was a sign that in fact Germany was going to have a deep water port and they were going to use it as a springboard to interrupt British shipping. When we researched it, Jim and I discovered that the size of that so-called gunboat was physically smaller than the king of England's royal yacht. What? But history has portrayed this as a massive threat to the British Empire and its "masculinity," if you like—because that's how they saw themselves.

Ultimately, the Moroccan crises passed without warfare because, despite the best efforts of Milner and his associates, cooler heads prevailed. Likewise the Balkans descended into warfare in the years prior to 1914, but Europe as a whole didn't descend with them. But, as we well know, the members of the Round Table in the British government, in the press, in the military, in finance, in industry, and in other positions of power and influence eventually got their wish: Franz Ferdinand was assassinated and within a month the trap of diplomatic alliances and secret military compacts that had been so carefully set was sprung. Europe was at war.

In retrospect, the machinations that led to war are a master class in how power really operates in society. The military compacts that committed Britain—and, ultimately, the world—to war had nothing to do with elected parliaments or representative democracy. When Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Balfour resigned in 1905, deft political manipulations ensured that members of the Round Table, including Herbert Henry Asquith, Edward Grey and Richard Haldane—three men who Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman [privately accused](#) of "Milner worship"—seamlessly slid into key posts in the new Liberal government and carried on the strategy of German encirclement without missing a step.

In fact, the details of Britain's military commitments to Russia and France, and even the negotiations themselves, were deliberately kept hidden from Members of Parliament and even members of the cabinet who were not part of the secret society. It wasn't until [November 1911](#), a full six years into the negotiations, that the cabinet of Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith started to learn the details of these agreements, agreements that had been repeatedly and officially denied in the press and [in Parliament](#).

This is how the cabal functioned: efficiently, quietly and, convinced of the righteousness of their cause, completely uncaring about how they achieved their ends. It is to *this* clique, not to the doings of any conspiracy in Sarajevo, that we can attribute the *real* origins of the First World War, with the nine million dead soldiers and seven million dead civilians that lay piled in its wake.

But for this cabal, 1914 was just the start of the story. In keeping with their ultimate vision of a united Anglo-American world order, the jewel in the crown of the Milner Group was to embroil the United States in the war; to unite Britain and America in their conquest of the German foe.

Across the Atlantic, the next chapter in this hidden history was just getting underway.